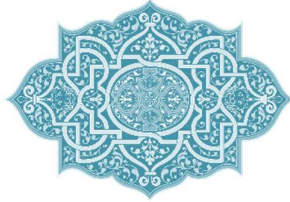


KEY POINTS – LESSON 13



Speaker: Sheikh Kamal El-Mekki¹⁰

DEALING WITH ADDICTIONS AND TEMPTATION – PART 1

How we get ‘hooked’

Let’s start with a scenario. Suppose there is a brother who is suffering from addictions and temptations. He comes to know that there is a scholar who is giving a speech on how to control temptations. He goes there to attend the lecture. The scholar says that the addiction can be treated through the love of Allah swt and through salah. This brother is now in awe that how could that even be possible. He might also think that the scholar has no idea of how human mind works. He doesn’t understand psychology of addictions and is a simple-minded person who does not understand the therapies involved in dealing with addiction. Let’s park this discussion here and we will come back to this later on.

A lot of what we know about addictions today come from lab experiments on rats that were done in early 20th century. For example, in one of the experiments, a rat was put in a cage and served with two containers of water – one was simple water and the other contained diamorphine (which is also known as Heroin). The rat kept going to the container that contained the drug until it becomes obsessed with it and drinking so much that killed it. The experiment yielded the same results over and over again. They defined this phenomenon as ‘chemical hooks’ which cause craving in your brain. Once you are exposed to an addictive thing for 21 days, you are ‘hooked’.

¹⁰ Shaykh Kamal El Mekki has been dubbed the Black Belt of Da’wah. With decades of experience in the Da’wah scene, Shaykh Kamal combines his ground-breaking teaching style with his own dash of humor, certain to leave students feel at ease & entertained, but above all skilled and empowered.

Shaykh Kamal has served as the Imam of George Mason University and has also served as a radio talk show host for a large Islamic radio station in America. He is known best for his workshop "How to Give Shahadah in 10 Minutes", a 6-hour workshop designed to empower MSAs and Dawah organizations in the art of Da’wah. His lectures and online videos (targeting contemporary challenges) have also gained popular fame and positive impact among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Educated at the hands of numerous prominent Islamic scholars from across the world, Shaykh Kamal also has dynamic experience in the secular world.



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Being in a group helped mice avoid getting addicted

In 1971, this experiment was questioned by other psychologists. It was pointed out that the experiment above was done with a lone and bored rat who was in the cage by itself. They thought about what would be the effect if they do the experiment with a group. They came up with the idea of a rat park where a fancy cage was built where the rats could play with each, had both genders to satisfy their needs, had tunnels and other places where they could visit and enjoy. Now in that rat park, they again placed those two containers of water. This time they noticed that no rat became obsessed or addicted to it. All of them, for the most time, drank the normal water. Being in a group that was not addicted, prevented the mice from addiction. None of them killed themselves with overdose.

This theory now shifted the previous understanding. However, the scientists thought that it could possibly be something that is related to mice alone and may not be applicable to human beings. They then studied the soldiers who were deputed in Vietnam during the war. 20% of them were found to be addicted to drugs and were heavy heroin users. People got worried that when these guys come back home, it would fill the country with junkies. However, interestingly, 95% of them left the drug use when they came back.

Our heart needs something or someone to love

The above experiments then brought another shift in the understanding about addictions. It was now understood that being involved in social settings and having someone to love is one of the great cures and prevention mechanism for addiction. The absence of social network works as a catalyst of addiction. But once back in the normal social settings, most of the people become normal again and chemical hooks are no longer able to keep them hooked – no rehab required for most people.

We can accordingly conclude that our hearts need someone or something to bond with. If we don't have that someone, we can bond with chemicals, we can bond with gambling, we can bond with pornography and so on. We need something to fill our hearts with. This is a new shift in thinking that was found after a number of experimentations. We know this since 1400 years. We are told that:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort. (Quran 13:28)

Coming back to that “simple-minded” sheikh

The contentment is not in drugs or pornography and other addictions. It is in attaching our heart with Allah as we come to know from above.

Now let us come back to that simple-minded sheikh. Was he correct in saying that treatment to addiction is filling one's heart with Allah's love and connecting with him through the salah. Though



ICAN MATTERS OF HEART COURSE (DEC-18 TO JAN-19)

we called him a simpleton, he is 100% right – why would he be when his opinion is grounded in the Quran.

The heart is a vessel – always filled with something:

Our heart is like a vessel or a bottle of water. When water goes out of it, the bottle doesn't remain empty. It is immediately filled with air. When we put the water back again, the air goes out and is replaced with water. If you fill the bottle to the very top, no air would be left in that, and vice versa. There is never a moment when there is a vacuum in the bottle. It is filled with something and there is never a vacuum. Had there been a vacuum, the bottle would crumble and get destroyed. Our hearts, therefore, need something to be filled in them. If it is not the love of Allah, it would be the love of something else that would take His place in our hearts – this could be real estate, cars, politics, and other things from this mortal Dunya.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

Have you seen those who have taken their own desires as their god? (Quran 45:23)

If we fill our hearts with the love of Allah swt, it would start to replace the other loves that we have. When His love fills our heart completely, love of no mortal and temporary things would remain in our hearts.

A common parenting mistake

If you understand this, you will avoid many common mistakes that many parents make. When they want their children to quit a bad habit, they keep telling them how bad that thing is that they love. We think that they will break that bad habit this way. It doesn't work. You cannot create a vacuum in the water bottle. You have to fill it with love of Allah swt. Provide them with such opportunities that would increase the love of Allah swt in their hearts. It would naturally push out the harmful things that occupy their hearts.

'Love of Allah' vs. 'Fear of Allah'

The scholars of Islam say that love of Allah swt is more effective and better than the fear of Allah swt. The effect of fear of Allah is that one would stay away from haram. However, the effect of loving Allah swt is that one goes above and beyond what is required as a minimum. He would devote him or herself to extra good deeds in love of Allah. They would find it easier to give up bad deeds.

Love makes it easy to quite a bad habit

Let's us consider the example of smokers. Many of them find it hard to quit smoking. They make a promise to quit it and then 3 minutes later you find them smoking again. They blame it to stress and other things and this cycle continues. However, you sometimes find people who suddenly quit smoking. When you ask what happened, they give reasons such 'my fiancée told me that if I wish to



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marry her, I have to give up smoking'. Do you see a parallel? If you are in love, it is easy to quit a bad habit. Does this remind you of that simpleton sheikh. Our salvation and safety are in loving Allah swt. If this person would have loved Allah swt, he would have quitted years ago!

Love of Allah swt is the most powerful motivator

Ibn Sina was once traveling with a servant in a distant part of Khurasan with his servant Abdullah who always loved him and wanted to do things for him. Now in this very cold night, Ibn Sina was in need of something, he called his servant Abdullah who was under a blanket. Now at moment, that otherwise dutiful servant decided to ignore him and pretended as if he was asleep so that he doesn't have to leave his blanket. He called him a few times but he ignored. Ibn Sina knew that the servant preferred his own comfort over him. He was thinking like this and a little while later, he heard the person calling the adhan. The wind was so cold that it was piercing through the body. He was amazed to see this man standing up at the minaret in such a cold night to fulfill his duty towards his Master. At that moment, he realized that the true love is one of the most powerful motivators and it results in obedience despite whatever the situation may be. The love this man had with Allah swt helped him overcome his comfort.

The story of a man who went with Tablighi Jama'at

Sheikh Kamal El-Mekki explains that when he was studying in Pakistan, one of his friends was convinced by the tablighi brothers to go with them on Sehroza (3 days in tabligh / preaching). As it happens, they were required to leave for their destination after the tashkeel (allocation of place for preaching). He didn't know what place would that be. It came out to be a very very cold place up the mountains and all he had was a thin blanket. In the morning, he saw the tablighi brothers making wudhu with the cold water and washing themselves up as if cold water was not a problem at all. He never wanted to come out of bed but the brothers presented to him a bowl of water to make the wudhu with. The water had a frozen layer on top which he had to punch down to be able to use the water.

What would make one do the wudhu with cold water in such cold windy morning? Love! It would enable you happy overcome the difficulties in life and you would be able to do things which you can never do with love. Love someone who is always there and who glory will always remain. Love the one who created you from nothing. Love the one who is filling your lungs with air since your birth. Love the one who despite your disobedience keeps providing you. Love the one who is truly worthy of utmost love – Allah swt. This love would push out the temptations and addictions from our hearts.

A panicked traveler

One of the great scholars was asked about why do people hate death. He gave a very profound reply. He said that if you spend all of your life establishing yourself and rooting yourself in a place and then all of a sudden you are asked to leave and go to a place for which you never prepared, it is natural that you would hate it. People spend their whole life building for their stay on earth and they



ICAN MATTERS OF HEART COURSE (DEC-18 TO JAN-19)

do little for the hereafter. How can you expect them to be looking forward to going there? When the angel of death comes, it is very natural that the unprepared traveler would panic.

We all know that one day we have to embark that journey and there is no escape from that. Wouldn't it be better if we plan for that? Wouldn't it be better if we leave the instant gratification and work for the place which is our ultimate abode – either Jannah or the hellfire? Isn't it better to build a house in paradise by 12 extra rakahs of salah every day? Isn't it better to build palaces in Jannah by giving up arguing even when we are right? Isn't it better than to surround those mansions by beautiful trees through our dhikr? Isn't it better to look for the best of neighbors in Jannah – our beloved Prophet ﷺ by caring for and supporting the orphans within our communities? It is all in our hands and the time is now!

Are we ready to meet Allah swt

Suppose, if the angel of death come to you right now, how looking forward would be to him? Are you prepared? Will you be worried to die on account of your deeds? Would you hate to die? It can be heart-breaking to know that if we hate to meet Allah swt, He hates to meet us. And if we look forward to seeing him, He would love to meet us too.

مَنْ أَحَبَّ لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ لِقَاءَهُ وَمَنْ كَرِهَ لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ كَرِهَ اللَّهُ لِقَاءَهُ

Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him, and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah hates to meet him. (Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 37, Hadith 4405, Grade: Saheeh)

You can prepare for that. You can repent from this very moment. He, the most forgiving, will forgive all your sins and replace them with good deeds. Make a fresh start. With Allah, it is never too late to come back.

Our pious predecessors' preparedness for death

When we look at the life of our pious predecessors, they were always prepared for death. When Bilal R.A. was on his deathbed, his wife was saying sad things. He stopped her and said the 'tomorrow I will meet our beloved and his companions' – that's what he was looking forward to.

When another of the great early Muslims was about to die, he was crying. His family members thought that he is crying because he was about to die. He said, no. He was crying because he would be in his grave for thousands of years and would not have an opportunity to stand up in prayer at night and weep in front of his Lord. That was what made him cry. Can you imagine what he was worried about and what he was going to miss?

Another early Muslim was on his deathbed and he heard the Adhan. He asked his sons to lift him to the masjid. His sons told him that he was exempt from going to Masjid on account of his illness. He told them that I am preparing and praying for this moment for years. I always wanted to die in



ICAN MATTERS OF HEART COURSE (DEC-18 TO JAN-19)

prayer and now when I am about to die, you want me to pray home. His sons carried him to the mosque where he died in prostration.

These were the people who were planning to meet Allah swt. That is how they wanted to meet Allah swt. That is how they used to love worship of Allah swt.

Worshipping with love

Sufyan Ath-Thauri is known to remain in prostration between Maghrib and Isha. What made them do such long sujood? Why wasn't it boring for them? What kept him awake at night?

Let us understand this with an example. Does anyone hate sleeping? Does anyone think that sleeping is a burden and it is bad for you? No one. Because it relaxes you and makes you feel better. How can you dislike something that soothes you and gives you comfort?

The same applied to the early Muslims with regards to worship. This gave them comfort. This gave contentment to their heart. If we develop that love too, we will feel the same.

Is this even possible?

Satan loves to hinder our way to goodness. It may come to us and say that how could it even be possible. Let us understand this through a real-life example that we can all relate too.

Suppose there is a student who is trying to memorize the Quran and he is stuck on Surah Al-Bayyinnah for months. He is not even able to memorize those 11 ayahs. If someone comes and tells him that there is a guy who has memorized the whole book. What would be the reaction of this student? He would certainly ask 'How could this even be possible?'.

On the other hand, there is a student who has already memorized 27 juzz and he is left with just three. If someone comes to him and tells him that another student is memorized the whole book, what would be his reaction? He would say that it is certainly very possible and I can get there too.

So we can all work towards achieving excellence in our worship. We can continue to move in that direction and continue to make an effort. InshaAllah, the barakah, and acceptance would come in these efforts.